

## An Additional Historical Record of Leadbeater's Possum, *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* McCoy, prior to the 1961 Re-discovery of the Species.

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The endangered species of arboreal marsupial, Leadbeater's possum, *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* McCoy, is significant because it is the only native mammal restricted to Victoria and one of the faunal emblems of that State. Virtually all sightings of *G. leadbeateri* in the past 30 years are from the Central Highlands of Victoria within an area of 60 km x 50 km that has limits of approximately 37°20' and 37°55'S latitude and 145°30' and 146°20'E longitude (Lindenmayer *et al.* 1991a). Some of the more major settlements in this region include Healesville, Marysville, Warburton, Powelltown, Noojee and Tanjil Bren.

All the records of *G.leadbeateri* dating from before its re-discovery in 1961, including those from where the species was described, were collected outside the Central Highlands of Victoria (Lindenmayer *et al.* 1991a). This note summarises the early distribution records of *G. leadbeateri* and describes a specimen previously overlooked before the re-discovery of the species in 1961.

*G. leadbeateri* was described from two male specimens (No. C4379 and C4380) collected from the banks of the Bass River near Westernport, south-eastern Victoria (McCoy 1867; Dixon 1970). Kemp (1979) considered that these animals may have come from Woodleigh Station, north-east of Korumburra. However, the precise location of these specimens has not been resolved.

In the 40 years following the discovery of the species, only two additional specimens were taken (No. C1965 and C4378). Initially, both were believed to have

been collected in 1899 from the Bass River area (Anon 1899) approximately 60 km to the south of the Central Highlands of Victoria. Professor B. Spencer reported that one of these specimens, a male (No C1965) and the third to be collected, was presented to the National Museum of Victoria by Mr. A. Coles (Anon 1899). However, Brazenor (1932) discovered that one of the animals (No. C4378) was collected from Koo Wee Rup Swamp, 30 km to the north of the Bass River. Brazenor (1932) also found a previously overlooked female specimen (No. 4377) from an abandoned gold mining camp at Sunnyside, Mt. Wills in north-central Victoria, approximately 250 km north-east of the locations of the other records of the species. Repeated surveys in the Sunnyside area (Brazenor 1932, Fleay 1933) and the nearby Mitta Mitta area (Brazenor 1931), failed to locate *G. leadbeateri*. Surveys in the Bass River Valley and Koo Wee Rup regions were also unsuccessful (Nicholls 1911; Barrett 1942) and by the mid-20th century the species was considered to be extinct (Brazenor 1950). *G.leadbeateri* was "re-discovered" in 1961 near Marysville, in the Central Highlands of Victoria (Wilkinson 1961). The species had not been known from this region before this time.

Prior to 1961, five specimens of *G. leadbeateri* were collected, and all of these dated from 1909 or earlier. A recent examination of records in the National Museum of Victoria has revealed the existence of another record of the species dating from before 1961. A mounted specimen of *G. leadbeateri* (No. C3148) is presently held in the National Museum of Victoria. The specimen was originally housed in the Burke Museum in Beechworth, northern Victoria. The present administrator of the Burke Museum, Mr. G. Gray, personally delivered

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the specimen for cleaning to the National Museum of Victoria in the early 1960s (G. Gray pers.comm.). The existence of the mounted specimen of *G. leadbeateri* in the natural history collection was acknowledged in the Report of the Burke Memorial Museum, dated 16 December 1960. The specimen was contained in a cabinet with numerous other mounted study skins and was between 50-100 years old at the time of its transport to Melbourne in the early 1960's (G. Gray pers. comm.). A check of the Natural History Catalogue at the Burke Museum (1877-1933) as well as the records of the Museum of Victoria has revealed no other details of the specimen and the exact site of collection could not be determined. Further evidence of the existence of the specimen was confirmed by Dixon and Huxley (1981), and by an examination of records kept by the former Fisheries & Wildlife Division of Victoria (Department of Conservation & Environment, unpublished records).

During the mid-late 19th century, Beechworth was one of the major towns between Sydney and Melbourne and an exchange of specimens may have taken place between Beechworth and other centres. However, the town of Beechworth is only 90 km NW of Mt. Wills where *G. leadbeateri* was collected in 1909 (Brazenor 1932). It is possible that the mounted specimen from the Burke Museum, and now in the National Museum of Victoria, may be another record of *G. leadbeateri* from outside the Central Highlands of Victoria. The only other records of *G. leadbeateri* from areas north of the Central Highlands of Victoria are fossils from pleistocene-aged deposits in the Wombeyan and Marble Arch Caves in N.S.W. (Broom 1896, Hall 1974) and a number of similar deposits in the Buchan region (Hope 1976).

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